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# Distributed Authorship: A Feminist Case-Study Framework for Studying Intellectual Property

**Sarah Robbins**

**R**ecent, highly productive discussions of intellectual property and authorship in English studies have concentrated on two broad areas of inquiry. Scholars have repeatedly asserted fair use principles to mobilize resistance against the legal trends restricting texts' circulation. At the same time, our growing appreciation of student writing and other marginalized groups' creative acts as forms of authorship has prompted teacher-scholars' calls for recognizing the shared patterns of ownership often associated with such work. Andrea A. Lunsford and Susan West, of course, set the stage for succeeding discussions in their groundbreaking essay, "Intellectual Property and Composition Studies." Significantly, they identified both of the major areas of inquiry that have driven intellectual property work in composition studies since then. On the one hand, they critiqued "the field's silent complicity in shrinking the intellectual commons" and pointed to challenges from critical theory, the scientific community, and new technology that should promote less modernist views of authorship (387). On the other, they noted that "teachers often in effect appropriate the writing of students," unfairly moving to "commodify and trade in the commercial value of student writing, which legitimates teacherly claims to particular intellectual terrain" (398). Building on the first point, intellectual property activists have focused on protecting the rights *consumers* need to have in order to access and use others' textual products—often as a step toward creating (or authoring) their own "new" texts. As a "flip side" of the intellectual property issue, the emphasis has been on protecting *producers* who are potentially vulnerable to appropriation and/or misuse, in large part because their status as authors is tenu-

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ous. So, in both directions, authorship has been at the heart of intellectual property discussions.

Both of these energetic strands in intellectual property studies have made effective use of historical critique, partly by retracing various processes that led, in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to a reconceptualization of authorship, and its attendant rights, as reflected in copyright law (Woodmansee and Jaszi, “Law”; McGill). In recovering this history, scholars have emphasized that the Romantic, or Wordsworthian, construction of authorship (which informs so many social practices associated with intellectual property) should not be viewed as a permanent, immutable fixture on the landscape of textual production and circulation. Instead, pioneering scholarship has emphasized, the Wordsworthian model of autonomous authorship should be seen as a historicizable element in a developmental process—as an evolving idea whose current extensions into protectionist legislation or appropriations of others’ writing can, in fact, be resisted.

Now that this history of the social construction of the author as a possessive, individual (even when corporate) “owner” of text has been clearly reconstructed, we can complicate that very narrative. One way to extend our understanding is by studying diverse particular cases of authorship and intellectual property. Such case studies underscore the fact that the idea of proprietary authorship was gradually and unevenly developed, not formulated in regular, progressive steps. Historical case studies can show that one stable, individualistic conception of textual ownership did not decisively (in one period, once and for all) overturn a less possessive ideology. Meanwhile, connecting those case studies to current examples of contested intellectual property can underscore ongoing tensions between postmodern visions of writing and lingering traditional views. This move to complicate the larger narrative of authorship’s cultural evolution is essential if we are to understand how/why writers today—including those in classrooms—can draw simultaneously on conflicting views of authorship and textual ownership. For instance, such cases can help explain the phenomenon Candace Spigelman has described among her students, who, working in groups, viewed their writing in ways consistent with “an enduring, albeit unstable, conception of the product of the writer’s labor as at once his or her own and, at the same time, under particular circumstances, appropriable by others” (250). Overall, a richer, more complex history of intellectual property—one including specific, disparate instances to complement larger narratives of progressive change—can also move us toward the practice of what Lunsford has recently described as “a new rhetoric of authorship, one that rejects the naïve construction of author as originary genius or as entrepreneurial corporate entity, without diminishing the importance of agency, and of difference, to the lives of working writers” (“Rhetoric” 534).

In fact, the “new rhetoric of authorship” Lunsford envisions may not be entirely new. The case study I present here includes, in Lunsford’s terms, gendered “enactments, tracings of alternative forms of being and owning” (535). Despite a historical context different from our own, these “alternative forms” offer some strategies for what I call *distributed authorship*, a view of shared textual ownership adaptable to today’s writing and publication circumstances.

#### A FEMINIST FRAMEWORK FOR STUDYING INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

During the nineteenth century, women writers and editors in the United States were just beginning to claim a viable position in the literary marketplace. Therefore, issues of textual ownership were often central to their thinking and literary practice. To probe one case of free-ranging textual circulation, and to address issues associated with producers’ rights to textual ownership and authorial credit, I have examined Americanized versions of British writer Anna Barbauld’s primers. Though unfamiliar to most of us today, Barbauld’s *Lessons for Children* was a popular and influential text guiding mothers’ at-home teaching of reading on both sides of the Atlantic from the late eighteenth through the first half of the nineteenth century. Published initially in England in 1778, *Lessons for Children* presented a set of dialogues between a mother and her son Charles, a character based on Barbauld’s adopted child (Robbins, “*Lessons*”). Through shared discussion of increasingly complex scenarios set in the home and beyond, the Barbauldian mother teaches her son both how to decode print text and how to see his place in the world as a thoughtful, energetic, and successful citizen. The *Lessons*’ middle-class-oriented program for domestic education, in fact, allowed the text to remain amazingly popular among American readers even after the Revolution. In particular, Barbauld’s version of the mother figure as teacher effectively supported ideas about republican motherhood that were evolving on into the nineteenth century (Robbins, “*Future*”). For intellectual property studies today, Barbauld’s interest in creating that *gendered* social role and making it accessible (in print) for middle-class women can yield some useful dividends, partly because the complex position of women writers in the literary marketplace shaped her enactment of authorship.

In foregrounding gender as one analytical category that can assist our efforts to interpret intellectual property, I hope to move beyond what has on occasion been a simplified juxtaposition of authorship in past eras “versus” authorship today. We often invoke a strong contrast between poststructuralist and modernist ideas about authorship, and we have set up related dichotomies emphasizing the collective aspects of writing today “versus” the (wrongheaded) belief in individual “ownership,” to resist excessive protectionism and to celebrate collaboration. Using analytical

tools such as social class, race, and gender in our studies of intellectual property, however, can help us complicate the picture. Nineteenth-century American women's texts provide an especially fertile ground for intellectual property case studies, partly because of U.S. culture's tendency then to position a woman's labor as both private (belonging to her family in the home) and public (belonging to the community), and, in either case, *not* clearly possessed by her individually. At the same time, and more practically than ideologically, increasing numbers of middle-class women's texts, generating high sales as the century progressed, challenged the belief that the work of female writing should stay confined to (semi)private audiences (for house-to-house letters, in parlor clubs). This development encouraged a growing, if sometimes grudging, acceptance of the lady professional author selling words to a mass public audience, while maintaining a degree of personal ownership of the product—whether seen through the right to negotiate with a publisher or in the personal fame of a woman author's writerly identity (Kelley; Coultrap-McQuin).

Yet, the category of lady author remained contested. For instance, Anne Ruggles Gere has pointed to an alternative tradition of authorship actively maintained by clubwomen in their shared writings, even at the turn into the twentieth century, when “texts [had come] to be viewed as commodities” and “the concept of authorship [had] achieved its contemporary contours.” Gere argues, in fact, that “women's clubs resisted both the aesthetic and legal/economic dimensions of the concepts of intellectual property and authorship” through such strategies as “communal rather than individual ownership of texts” (384, 387). Given this complex, shifting context—one anticipating today's concerns about the vexed relations between experience and representation—interpreting portrayals of gendered authorship from that earlier period throws helpful light upon current textual ownership issues.

The loose genre from which I draw my case study is the narrative of domesticated literacy management (Robbins, “Future”). Beginning in the early post-Revolutionary era, popular narratives celebrated American mothers' work to teach children reading (or, in broader terms, to guide literacy development) and, at the same time, to mold proper civic identities, especially for their sons. Though focused on home instruction, these early versions of the genre were already positioning female literacy (and particularly female authorship) as a public action. Whether a biographical narrative of Mrs. Washington as exemplary mother-teacher of young George or a sequence of Frances Harper's Reconstruction story-poems prompting African American women to promote community literacy, these texts gradually defined a genre that celebrated maternal teaching as situated around home values but serving the nation. With their continued efforts to constitute female middle-class literacy management as a crucial *social* enterprise, these women writers' own self-representations as motherly teachers offer a highly self-conscious consideration of authorship—one interested both in claiming a distinctive role for women as authors and in

casting their intellectual work as done for the common good. Thus, the domestic literacy narrative genre provides an especially suitable body of writing for studying issues of textual ownership, since these narratives, by their very nature, positioned women's writing as publicly significant even when (semi)privately and/or individually composed.

Lunsford and West have effectively built upon work by Martha Woodmansee and Peter Jaszi to argue that views of authorship which emphasize originality, and which conceive of textual products as the property of their individual creators, are very much more closely related to "a distinctively modern notion that grew out of eighteenth-century European writers' bid for the legal right to reap financial rewards for their intellectual labor" than to our own current conceptions of writing as a social act (Lunsford and West 388). Juxtaposing the view of authors as individual possessors of their work with more recent constructions of authorship as often a self-consciously shared task (and certainly never a neatly individual one), these discussions have provided a powerful approach for resisting "an accelerating high protectionist trend in copyright" legislation, which can be shown as participating in an outmoded ideology holding tightly to the financial benefits that a text might give to its owners (384).<sup>1</sup> I hope to show that we must recognize both the constraints on fair use that an extreme view of authorship grounded in conceptions of possessive individualism promotes *and* the dangers to textual integrity (as well as, ultimately, to social views of authorship itself) that can develop in an undifferentiated, "opposite" view idealizing communal ownership.

Feminist material culture theory prompts us to pay attention to the author figure, in any age, as "constructed out of the available knowledges in a culture as they circulate in discourses and institutional practices" (Hennessy 37). By considering both individual authors and culturally constructed identities for those authors (that is, author functions) as forming within particular material conditions, we can see that what might be true of one writer in one situation/place will not apply to all authors, even those of the same era. Thus, as a woman living in late eighteenth-/early nineteenth-century England, Barbauld was limited in her ability to carry out the professional role of author that would have been more available to her contemporaries Wordsworth and Coleridge. Later, though, when printed versions of "Barbauld" circulated in the new United States before international copyright was established, *representations* of her as a writer could position her within a vision of women's authorship more coherent and empowered than she had initially claimed for herself. In fact, these Americanized versions of Barbauld's authorship fell at different points along a range of publishing practices, each promoting its own view of her authorship. Unpacking some of these specific differences—between her own original representation of authorship and that of a contemporary like Wordsworth; between portrayals of her authorship in English editions of her primer and Ameri-

can women's first editions of her work; between one American publisher's version of "Barbauld" and another's—can be instructive. These differing visions of "Barbauld" as author underscore how abstract concepts (such as intellectual property) associated with text making are continually being "shaped," like other "social forms and institutions," "through contestation among discourses and not by sheer self-assertion" (Hennessy 37).

We can also call upon feminist theories of epistemology like Lynn Hankinson Nelson's to reveal that particular groups create and guard competing ways of thinking about authorship and textual ownership. Nelson argues that "the primary generators and repositories of knowledge" are "communities" (151). She explains that "epistemological communities are multiple, historically contingent, and dynamic: they have fuzzy, often overlapping boundaries; they evolve, dissolve, and recombine; and they have a variety of 'purposes' and projects" (125). In this case, reviewing an authorial history like Barbauld's exemplifies how, in specific historical moments, different competing communities of knowledge and practice have generated varying conceptual and logistical systems of intellectual property. (Male) book publishers in the antebellum United States, as outlined below, had a vested interest in a loose, transportable ownership of Barbauld's text, whereas lady editors tended to have a firmer commitment to guarding the integrity of (at least some of) her writerly authority. Nelson's explanation of how such groups "construct and acquire knowledge" illuminates the continuing conflicts over authorship growing out of communities' varying needs and beliefs. So studying particular communities' efforts to generate different versions of "Barbauld" and her work complicates our understanding of authorship today—helps us to see it as a flexible cultural formation shaped by material conditions and contested beliefs about writing, reading, and texts themselves.

#### OLD AND NEW LESSONS ABOUT AUTHORSHIP

Elsewhere, I have chronicled multiple transformative textual interventions by various antebellum American packagers of Anna Barbauld's highly influential primer, *Lessons for Children*. I have shown how others felt free to change her wording, insert new phrases or whole passages, and add elements such as illustrations to reshape the text for their own purposes (Robbins, "Re-making"). I've suggested that the character of their interventions reflects these intermediaries' attempts to contribute to the developing genre of the domestic literacy narrative, which depicted a distinctively "American" maternal home-teaching role, closely linked to conceptions of republican motherhood. Here, I want to turn my attention away from the content of specific changes made *within* Barbauld's texts in various U.S. editions to the prevailing views on women's authorial "ownership" of writing (or, actually, near-absence of ownership) that made such aggressive emendations possible (for a related case in a

European context, see Woodmansee's analysis of La Roche in *Author* 104–08). In particular, I want to concentrate on the prefatory material in several different editions of Barbauld's works to underscore the instability of conceptions of female-gendered authorship in the early days of the American republic and on into the antebellum era. I highlight these tentative rhetorics of authorship to argue that, in scholarship and in teaching, we should construct more nuanced arguments about collaborative processes of composition, drawing clearer distinctions between fairly "crediting" others as co-generators of our texts, and financially compensating them in the marketplace.

Tracing the refiguring of Anna Barbauld from a living teacher-writer in one country into a book-based publishing commodity for another place, we can see that genre-related ideas about women's authorship shaped views of her authorial "self" and her text into what we today would see as a marketable literary property. Even though "Barbauld" is clearly not a household name in the early twenty-first century, the recovery of her place in American literary history reveals how much she was revered by maternal literacy managers and their children throughout the nineteenth century (see, for instance, Child; Mrs. Barbauld, *Lessons* 3). However, being valued as a useful teaching tool for home literacy instruction in the early American republic did not mean Barbauld or her heirs profited materially. Nor (and this is especially noteworthy in an intellectual property-oriented discussion) did she expect to do so. The initial "advertisement," crafted for her primer's first edition, but reprinted in many American ones for decades later, makes that clear—while illustrating the kind of inconsistent view of women's authorship itself that still contributes to debates about textual ownership and authority.

Most of Barbauld's original 1778 prefatory "advertisement" justified the creation of her book as a series of conversational vignettes to teach reading. The learner at the center of her narratives was her adopted son Charles, whom she and her husband reared while co-teaching at Palgrave Academy in southern England. Stressing the child's perspective as a reader, the introduction explained, "It was found, that, amidst the multitude of books professedly written for children, there is not one adapted to the comprehension of a child from two to three years old." Only near the end of the advertisement did the until-then invisible *author* set forth her own publishing *authority*—indirectly and in gendered terms: "They only, who have actually taught young children can be sensible how necessary these assistances are [. . .]. To supply these deficiencies is the object of this book. The task is humble, but not mean; for to lay the stone of a noble building, and to plant the first idea in a human mind, can be no dishonor of any kind."

Barbauld's blending of the cornerstone and seedling images was consistent with the then-uncertain view of female authorship in Anglo-European culture. On the one hand, the presumably inscribed foundation stone's permanent visibility was in



line with modernist views of authorship as a uniquely productive activity, well worth public recognition. (In personal terms, this image would be echoed throughout the nineteenth century by American women biographers' and editors' characterizations of Mrs. Barbauld as a "genius.") But that image was countered in the same advertisement by the much less assertive verbal picture of a seed, hidden beneath the soil while producing growth above ground. The second analogy may be more in line with our now-familiar conception of republican motherhood in the former colonies; like seeds sending tendrils into the "outside" environment, maternal domestic teachers remained themselves relatively cut off from direct engagement in public political culture (see Kerber). In any case, as a representation of Barbauld's writing process, the advertisement's plant metaphor was equally interesting, since it foreshadowed organic, nature-linked figurations of authorship in writers like Coleridge and Wordsworth, yet resisted overtly claiming unique genius/inspiration for the motherly author of something classified as a "little publication."

With intellectual property studies in mind, in fact, a rereading of the entire first sentence of Barbauld's advertisement is instructive: "*This little publication was made for a particular child, but the public is welcome to the use of it.*" Today, in the throes of Supreme Court-sponsored assertions of strong authorial claims based on originality and possessive individualism, we can make much of Barbauld's use of the passive voice here, her foregrounding of the child reader ahead of the implied author, and her hesitant invitation to imagined readers ("the public") to be "welcome to the use of it." Her self-effacing sentence reminds us how, at this point, women writers' sense of who "owned" print texts they wrote was often more similar to some feminist writers' views today than to Wordsworth's ideas about who "owned" his words on a book page. So, reviewing how post-Revolutionary American marketers replied to Barbauld's invitation to make "use" of her text, we can see intriguing connections between unstable conceptions of *gendered* authorship then and aggressive editorial practices that many would describe today as "violations" of intellectual property. Along those lines, we might begin to draw parallels between Barbauld's generous distribution of the rights to use her text then, and many girl Web 'zine writers' stances toward the ownership of their writing online today. In other words, given the parallels between the explosion of print technology disseminating women's writing for U.S. readers in the nineteenth century and the comparable, as-yet-lightly-regulated explosion of digital technology now, Barbauld's discursive moves to "give away" her text and her hesitancy to claim an assertive authorial identity become more understandable.

Consider, for example, the potentially exploitative "submissions policy" set forth on the *Girl's World* Web site, which encourages "girls and teens the world over" to take advantage of a "great opportunity" to send in material for online publication,

but which aggressively claims ownership of those submissions from the moment they arrive. The Web site does notify would-be authors: "Any submission you send to us or article you edit for us becomes the property of A Girl's World Online Clubhouse and cannot be returned." Simply by submitting her work, a young girl author gives the Web site "the right to publish both your Submission and your first name, last initial, age, state or country and penpal number," "for any type of use." Furthermore, the Web site's inviting statement about "need[ing] articles" as informal as discussions of "what is hot and not" is framed by a reminder that "All materials you post, edit, email, mail or submit to 'A Girl's World,' including ideas, suggestions, concepts, stories, advice, artwork, photographs, graphic files, notes, messages, chats or any other material ('Submissions'), will become the property of 'A Girl's World Online Clubhouse' and cannot be returned." The Web site itself, it seems, becomes both publication space and author.

It is crucial to realize that, at the turn into the nineteenth century, the loose equivalent of today's corporate manager/owner of *A Girl's World*—the book publisher unrestrained by international copyright and the editor who worked with that publisher—could exercise enormous control over texts like Anna Barbauld's primers, written in England but often very profitably marketed in America. In practice, this control could be exercised within very different conceptions of authoring and editing. To illustrate this point, below I examine two introductions to U.S. editions of Barbauld's work—representations of the editorial process that reflect contrasting views of Barbauld's authorship and of editing as exercising textual control.

The first is an "Americanized" edition of the *Lessons*, published in Philadelphia in 1788, ten years after her own first edition and well before the series of English copyright extensions described by Woodmansee and Jaszi as representative of a period when legal and literary ideas about authorship were generally well aligned ("The Law of Texts" 770–71). This early U.S. edition bore the following title and italicized subtitle: *Mrs. Barbauld's Lessons for Children from Two to Four Years Old [ . . . ] with Alterations Suited to the American Climate, by a Lady*. Choosing not to name herself, the editor instead stressed her debt to the text's original author, prominently named in the title as "Mrs. Barbauld." Thus, in a new advertisement bound after a reprinting of Barbauld's, this American presenter of the *Lessons* offered a personal endorsement of the English writer more than an assertion of new editorial agency:

The Editor of this little work, cannot let it appear in this new world, without acknowledging the benefit she received from it. At the time it was first published she was just teaching two of her children to read, which in the common way, with a spelling-book, she found a laborious task; for, notwithstanding the pains she took, they were not able to sound half the words in a column of monosyllables; but as soon as these books were put into their hands, they eagerly set about reading them, and in a very short time could read perfectly in any book.

The unnamed editor went on to explain that her inconsequential “alterations” to the text were “so few and so trifling, that the merit of the performance remains with Mrs. Barbauld, the ingenious author” (3–4). In insisting upon Barbauld’s continuing authority over the text, while associating its power with her “ingeniousness,” this early American edition of the *Lessons* helped lay some groundwork for what we today might term a strong assertion of intellectual property rights of the first author over her text. Significantly, however, this introduction also suggested a gendered variation on that view of authorial ownership—one allowing for empathetic sharing between the woman writer and her female reader(s). This vision of collective authorship also imagined shared circulation capabilities, though *not* composition credit, based on a gender-specific ability to access the text. Such a view of shared yet carefully credited textual intellectual property, then, could help refine readers’ genre expectations—whether for domestic teaching narratives or other women’s books, such as romances (see Radway). In this case, the “lady” editor linked her expansion of the text’s “benefit” to a broader audience with another kind of intellectual labor—the gendered task of teaching young children to read. Implicitly, her prefatory comments connect her audience’s use of this text with their having the responsibility for home reading instruction. For this editor, then, and for her anticipated audience, ownership of the *Lessons* was cast as communal, grounded in a common gender identity and related social role, even though credit for its efficacy was still assigned to the original author.

The affiliative stance toward shared authorship that was staked out by the 1788 “lady” editor of Barbauld’s text was upheld over the years by later women editors, who also carefully credited her authorial power even when adapting her text to fit their own Americanized needs. Editors like Sarah Hale, Mary Hughs, and Grace Ellis, packaging Barbauld’s work throughout the nineteenth century, continued to distribute Barbauld’s authorship in ways anticipating what Lunsford (drawing on Esther Dyson) has described as grounded “in the relationships surrounding and nurturing the movement of content through networks of users and producers” (“Rhetoric” 534). These women editors positioned their own management of Barbauld’s texts as affiliative network building but still honored her authorial power—even, as was often said, her “genius.” At the same time, just as Lunsford says could be the case in some process-oriented textual exchanges today, the “owner” (or profit-maker) of the texts in such instances was not so much Barbauld and her lady editors and readers, but the corporate entity marketing and distributing her books.

Significantly, when we set the rhetoric of these community-oriented Barbauldian editors next to the position statements emerging in today’s Creative Commons movement, we find some striking parallels. The compatibility of rationales and strategies for sharing text evident in both groups’ discussions of their work reinforces my point that connections between authorship and textual ownership need to be viewed in

particular material contexts rather than framed in a simple then/now narrative. For instance, a recent online essay from the Creative Commons Web site featured the efforts of a Rice University professor, Rich Baraniuk, to make textbook-writing collaborative—to distribute its authorship—by establishing Connexions, “an experimental, open-source/open-content project,” providing “a learner [with] free access to educational materials that can be readily manipulated to suite [sic] her individual learning style” and to “foster the development, manipulation, and continuous refinement of educational material by diverse communities of authors and teachers” (Craddock). By viewing his own contributions to an online engineering textbook very much as Barbauld presented her initial primer—as open to use by the public—Baraniuk envisions a constantly evolving, ever-adaptable repository of teaching tools to which multiple authors (like Barbauld’s lady editors) could continually contribute. But when the university’s legal team began trying to develop “licenses that would both protect authors’ intellectual property rights and allow the sort of open usage and modifications” that Connexions aimed to provide, the staff was stymied: accustomed to framing policies from a protectionist stance, they were flummoxed by Baraniuk’s goal of “maximum openness.” Eventually, however, after calling upon a Creative Commons activist lawyer for help, the two sides achieved a difficult but important goal, which Baraniuk describes as “to license content in a way that left it open and dynamic, but still offered protections.”<sup>2</sup> Baraniuk explains that other academics have been eager to contribute to the project, since “with these licenses they aren’t giving up credit, and they are opening their ideas up to what is potentially a huge audience.”

The parallels between these two scenarios—the practices of the *Lessons*’ nineteenth-century lady editors and the protocols Creative Commons helped establish for Connexions—are even more striking when we see how they both differ from another line of publications that grew out of Barbauld’s writing. In these other cases, nineteenth-century publishers erased Barbauld’s authorship entirely, absorbing her work into a capitalist enterprise placing more emphasis on marketing books than on enhancing audience members’ ability to teach other students of their own. The contrast between the position staked out by the early “lady” editor referred to above and her descendents, on the one hand, and the very different viewpoint expressed by John Pierpont in his *Young Reader: To Go with the Spelling Book* is quite telling in this regard. Published in Boston in 1831, the *Young Reader* was actually a compilation of various educational works and excerpts by Barbauld and many others. There the references to Barbauld, and to her peer authors of English juvenile texts, underscore Pierpont’s less individualized conception of women’s professional authorship—especially authorship in children’s literature, which by the 1830s, thanks to mass market periodicals like Sarah Hale’s *Ladies’ Magazine*, was increasingly being gendered female in the United States. They also foreshadow a process in the historical devel-

opment of American curriculum writing that is well worth noting—a tendency to construct the “textbook” as acquiring authority through its affiliation with a corporate author function that elides the personal identity of particular writers, and, by extension, discourages individual teachers from rewriting those texts to meet context-specific needs.

The conception of authorship presented in Pierpont’s preface seems, at first glance, to be even more self-effacing than Barbauld’s in her own original advertisement. Pierpont justifies his decision not to identify specific authors for any of the particular selections in his collection partly on the grounds of a sensitive awareness of his audience of “very young children,” who he says rarely have any “interest” in the “authorship of a piece.” While disdaining to take or give credit, Pierpont (magnanimously?) assumes responsibility for the “thought” and “language” of the lessons. Claiming that he “owe[ed] no apology” and therefore “offer[ed] none, to my fellow laborers in this field,” Pierpont explains that he has merely imitated peers in having “taken advantage of these benefactors of mankind.” By characterizing his sources as “benefactors” and insisting that their work is “now common property,” Pierpont frees himself “to alter, without scruple, whatever appeared to me objectionable.”

Amid all this posturing, Pierpont’s assertion of his right “to alter” (versus a “copy-right”) was doubtless unalarming to child and adult readers of his day. As noted earlier, Barbauld’s American lady editors also felt free to make changes in her text. A distinction might be made here, however, between editions that scrupulously identified an original author while also admitting to making changes, and a text like this one of Pierpont’s, where authorship was not clearly designated for specific selections, but the right to do more than copy—the right to remake—was asserted. Editions like the unnamed lady editor’s, which declared they were adding “new American” illustrations to Mrs. Barbauld’s *Lessons* or that justified vocabulary adjustments on the basis of their being in line with the “climate and the familiar objects of this country,” did (through author/source acknowledgments) implicitly empower the reader to compare the new versions with the original. Pierpont’s emendations are more problematic, though, even in terms of current conceptions of textual ownership stressing the collaborative nature of writing. Since his compilation failed to identify sources for his borrowed entries, which are actually culled from numerous authors, we cannot easily uncover disjunctions between his versions and the originals. His weak sense of others’ authorship as a locus of control over textual integrity denied even his original readers the kind of ownership over meaning that a cursory reading of his preface would suggest they have. Rather than being “common property,” the words and ideas of his compilation actually were regulated by him alone. (Pierpont’s repeated use of first-person singular throughout his description of his editing-writing process is quite telling in this regard: “I, therefore, have been obliged

to take into this collection, a good deal of matter that has been repeatedly used before [. . .]. *I* have adopted one rule, which is, to alter, without scruple, whatever appeared to *me* objectionable: and *I* have endeavoured to satisfy *myself* that, in this, *I* do the author no wrong, but in no case do *I* give the writer's name" [emphasis added]).

Different as they are, the prefaces of Barbauld's 1788 American lady editor and of Pierpont both enact, themselves, a form of authorship through their editing. Considering their contrasting stances, we get a sense of what readers, writers, and editors gained and lost in an era before academic citation conventions associated with strong authorial ownership were firmly established. Today, with digital texts paralleling the earlier era's print explosion, we might want at least to consider following the lead of the *Lessons'* early lady editor and her nineteenth-century descendants in maintaining authorial credit-giving even when we want to affirm more communal rights over the interpretation and circulation management of texts. At the same time, we might note the problems that result when authorial credit becomes so blurred as to make the monitoring of textual integrity impossible. Editors' and publishers' having the freedom to rewrite Barbauld's didactic texts eventually meant that segments of her writing worked its way into an undifferentiated intellectual commons for home teaching. As Jaszi has aptly shown, "[T]he conditions of the Internet environment today resemble those which prevailed at other moments of polymorphous collaboration, unrestrained plagiarism, and extraordinary productivity" (55). In both Barbauld's case and in the online environment of Web sites like *A Girls World.com* today, we face important questions about textual ownership. To what extent do the social benefits of "free" use of such fluid texts outweigh the problems of not being able to track where and how layers of change have occurred? Are conventions for signaling such layers—in hypertextual environments, for instance—developable? reliable? enforceable? desirable? With these questions in mind, we might consider the possibility of distinguishing more carefully between intellectual property issues related to attribution, textual integrity, and (collective) textual reconfigurations, on the one hand, and those related more directly to monetary compensation, on the other.

Noting the competing versions of authorship and textual ownership at play in representations of Barbauld's particular authorship also encourages us to question what motivations may be prompting compositionists today to view intellectual property issues differently than some other communities do. For example, this case study should prompt us to ask why our beliefs about plagiarism often take a more protectionist stance toward authorship than our students', whereas our wish to distribute copyrighted material in a classroom places us at odds in another direction with publishers' and some professional writers' interests in protecting textual ownership rights.

Sometimes, when we complain about encroachments on our "fair use" rights, we act as if having unfettered use of texts would be ideal—promoting "free" circula-

tion, that could be unproblematically aligned with our current theoretical conceptions of authorship as collective, or social. In fact, as examples from the unrestricted circulation of Barbauld's *Lessons* have shown, an extreme application of "free use" can actually elide aspects of the social writing processes behind a particular text. For instance, when packagers like Pierpont and his heirs appropriated Barbauldian texts without assigning credit, they began a suppression process that eventually allowed for words and thoughts which had been produced by multiple collaborators in a particular material context to be recirculated in ways that erased that context. Such moves, over time, suppressed not only the individual agency of Barbauld as "author" but also the larger, ongoing contributions of many women writers to particular genres and teaching practices, thus eliding their influence on important cultural work. In a sense, then, like the students in Spigelman's class who were able to "forget" the collaborative activities that had contributed to the creation of their texts in peer-writing groups, repackagers of Barbauld who saw no need to delineate their debts to her authorship often bequeathed us texts that "forgot" collective connections between nineteenth-century American publications and an eighteenth-century female forebear. So we may need to develop more sophisticated models for recording our patterns of appropriation, even while resisting excessive protectionist moves that restrain fair use. And we should try to teach practices that create a record of the meaningful, materially situated links between our writing and its sources, not because others we "credit" with conventions like footnotes are the sole owners of their texts, but rather to show *how* they have shared their work with us.<sup>3</sup>

If, for instance, I took sections of an essay from an anthology and dropped that writing into the new context of a course reading packet without signaling its original publication context, I would have done more than cheat the publisher of some slight monetary compensation; I would also have erased, for my students, some of what Bruce Horner has recently called the "material and social" aspects of authorship (526). My (re)presentation of this text in the new context of my class should include, if it is to be consistent with a belief in writing as collaborative, an explanation to my students about where and how the piece was originally published, why I have chosen it for use in the class, and how reading this selection now in its new republication space represents a kind of collective rewriting—a redistributed authorship. Along those lines, if a student took a piece of text from an Internet term paper site, then reworked it a bit for a section of her "own" paper without signaling that process, she might not need be condemned to academic death as a plagiarist (Howard 797). Of course, we would not want to celebrate her, uncritically, as a free-ranging author taking advantage of the still relatively open access of the Internet to "use" material there, as was possible in the pre-international copyright days for users of Barbauld's printed texts. But if we truly want to affirm a belief in the social aspects of all writ-



ing, while promoting informed critique of authorship in various material contexts, we should resist either extreme characterization of the hypothetical student's writing process and instead acknowledge the complexity inherent in all collaborations (both ethical and problematic). In practical terms, then, as an assignment required in part to avoid a more severe penalty, in part to wrestle with these issues herself, we might ask her to write critically about why she selected the text she appropriated, how its initial publication site (including its audience, purpose, and other rhetorical elements) was similar to and different from that of her "own" paper, and how she imagined her use of the borrowed text revised it rhetorically.

The material conditions and beliefs about authorship and textual ownership that were operating during the decades when Anna Barbauld's *Lessons* were first being published in America were certainly different from those in our own. Nonetheless, when interpreting the issues faced by her editors and readers, we can draw parallels to intellectual property concerns today, thereby generating new uses for her authorship. And the applicability of this case study suggests that our scholarship and teaching could be further enhanced by additional comparative work. Indeed, examining multiple specific cases of distributed authorship, and linking them to contemporary textual ownership issues, may well lead to nuanced extensions of the basic framework for understanding intellectual property that pioneers in the field have already formulated.

## NOTES

1. I should stress a point in Lunsford and West's critique of the "increasingly strong protectionist view of copyright"—that "information proprietors" are frequently not authors themselves (386–87). This situation would be true of Barbauld too, as we shall see: especially in America, she had far less control over her own authorship than did such "information proprietors" as book publishers not yet bound by international copyright. Lunsford revisits this important type of authorial context in her more recent "Rhetoric, Feminism, and the Politics of Textual Ownership," where she emphasizes the growing power of corporate entities in the control of authorship and textual ownership (535).

2. The Creative Commons homepage describes its organization's mission in terms reminiscent of Barbauld's first *Lessons* preface, announcing that it is "devoted to expanding the range of creative work available for others to build upon and share" ("Home"). The online "About Us" page describes the movement as aiming "not only to increase the sum of raw source material online, but also to make access to that material cheaper and easier." Drawing on resources from the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard Law School and the Stanford Law School, Creative Commons has released models of copyright licenses for public use and "has developed a Web application that helps people dedicate their creative works to the public domain—or retain their copyright while licensing them as free for certain uses, on certain conditions."

3. In the case of this essay, the starting point was a panel paper given at a CCCC conference with Susan Hunter, Margaret Walters, and Bob Yagelski. Since then, drafts of the work have benefited enormously from suggestions made by reviewers. Thanks go to all of these coauthors, including those whose names I do not know. Special thanks to Paul Prior for an encouraging reading of an early draft.



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